

10/12/2009 This Week in Congress

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October 12, 2009

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress."

Legislation to Cease "Czar" Appointments

From conversations with Kansans, I have heard their concerns about the recent increase of "czars" appointed to the administration. "Czars" are Presidential appointees named to serve as policy advisors or agency heads within the administration. These individuals are appointed by the administration and are not required to go through the Senate appointment process.

I have taken action by introducing H. Res. 778 - a resolution to formally express Congress' opposition to the "czar" appointment process while calling for the President to cease all "czar" appointments. I have also sponsored legislation that will prohibit an unconfirmed appointee's salary from being paid. It is time Congress stops the executive branch from abusing this flawed appointment process. [Click here to view my most recent comments about "czars".](#) [Click here to read more.](#)

NBAF Funding Approved

This week, a House and Senate Conference Committee approved a Homeland Security spending appropriations bill that includes \$32 million to complete the design and begin the construction of a new National Bio and Agro Defense Facility (NBAF) in Manhattan, Kansas. Funding for the bioscience research facility was not included in the House legislation but was included in the Senate legislation. A Conference Committee made up of House and Senate members reconciled the difference between the bills to produce the final appropriations bill that included funding for NBAF.

I am pleased this funding will keep the construction of NBAF on track for completion. I commend Senators Sam Brownback and Pat Roberts for their diligent efforts to include funding in the appropriations bill so that NBAF can move forward. This world class research facility will benefit Kansans for years to come - protecting our agriculture, growing our economy and providing an opportunity for our best and brightest young people to stay and work in Kansas.

This final spending legislation is expected to soon be considered by the House.

New, Expanded Outpatient Clinics for Kansas Veterans

Since first coming to Congress over 13 years ago, I have been a strong proponent of establishing Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Community Based Outpatient Clinic's (CBOC) in Kansas. As a senior member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee where I serve on the Subcommittee on Health, I am aware how important it is to make medical care more accessible to Kansas veterans, many of whom live long distances from VA hospitals. I have helped open five outpatient clinics in the state including Hays, Dodge City, Salina, Junction City and Hutchinson.

New Johnson County CBOC: This week, the House of Representatives approved legislation that authorizes a new CBOC in Johnson County. The legislation authorizes medical facility leases for the VA and is expected to be signed into law soon.

Veterans in the Johnson County area deserve timely access to medical care and I have been working with VA, the Kansas City VA Medical Center and the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs to establish the CBOC for Johnson County. The new veterans' clinic will provide comprehensive outpatient services, including mental health, as well as radiology, laboratory services and a pharmacy. It is estimated that occupancy of the to-be-determined facility will begin in June 2012.

The Johnson County veteran's clinic will mean closer medical services and less wait times for a large number of Kansas veterans who currently travel to the Kansas City VA Hospital in Missouri for health care. With passage of this legislation, I am pleased the VA can move forward on this clinic to provide quality medical care for those who sacrificed so much for our country. [Click here to view my comments about the Johnson County CBOC on the floor of the House of Representatives.](#)

Fort Dodge CBOC: Construction on the Fort Dodge CBOC, outside of Dodge City, has been completed. Three rooms have recently been added to the existing clinic. The addition will expand the mental health and telemedicine services that are provided to veterans at that location.

Salina CBOC: Opened in 2001, this CBOC allows veterans in north central Kansas to receive primary care services closer to home rather than having to drive to a VA hospital in Wichita or Topeka. Currently, the Salina CBOC is in the design stage for an expansion to the facility that will improve veterans' care.

Greeting Honor Flight Veterans at World War II Memorial

I greeted two Central Prairie Honor Flight groups of World War II Kansas veterans when they arrived this week at the World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C. to visit the monument for the first time. The Honor Flight Network is a nonprofit organization that transports veterans to Washington, D.C., to visit the National World War II Memorial along with other monuments. The National World War II Memorial was dedicated on May 29, 2004, and honors the 16 million people who served in the U.S. armed forces in World War II, the more than 400,000 that died and the millions that supported the war effort at home.

The Central Prairie Honor Flight Committee was established by the Central Prairie Resource Conservation and Development Council headquartered in Great Bend in an effort to raise donations to fly Kansas veterans to our nation's capital. To date, the Central Prairie Honor Flight has flown approximately 667 World War II veterans, and their Guardians, to view the memorial.

This week, more than 342 veterans and guardians from over 65 central and southeast Kansas counties flew into Washington, D.C. They were also from areas around Chanute, Garden City, Ulysses, Cimarron, Manhattan, Great Bend and Kinsley. The two trips were organized and planned by Honor Flight volunteers including: Ken Cheney; Lowell Downey; Larry Gates; Judy McReynolds; LaVeta Miller; Duane Ray; and Mike and Connie Vancampen.

It was an honor for me to observe such true patriots examine the place they hold in history and to see that their dedication and service has been forever commemorated. For more information about Honor Flight, please [click here](#).

Opposing Federal Aviation Administration User Fee

This week, I joined several other Members of Congress to express our opposition to President Obama over the institution of a user fee as a means of funding the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). The current system of funding the aviation trust fund is proven to be a reliable foundation for our aviation infrastructure. User fees have been proposed as an alternative to the current funding structure. I oppose user fees in aviation because I believe they would place an undue burden both in terms of administration and cost on small businesses and general aviation users. It would also be harmful to the aviation industry in Kansas.

In President Obama's budget for this year, his administration suggested moving toward a user fee structure in the future. My colleagues and I urged President Obama to drop the user fee issue once and for all and also requested that he not submit this flawed idea again when he submits next year's budget to Congress.

Attending Agriculture Subcommittee Hearing

Wednesday, I attended a House Agriculture Subcommittee on Conservation, Credit, Energy, and Research hearing to review implementation of the conservation title of the 2008 Farm Bill. During the hearing, the committee heard testimony from Jonathan Coppess, Administrator of the Farm Service Agency (FSA), and Dave White, Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). I stressed to Administrator Coppess that FSA needs to develop a long term plan for operation of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Millions of acres are set to expire over the next few years and farmers have little idea about whether the contracts will be eligible for reenrollment in the program. FSA needs to develop a system that will allow farmers to make long term planning decisions.

I also used the hearing as an opportunity to remind Chief White that under the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP), NRCS must give priority to water quantity conservation projects. During the 2008 Farm Bill, I inserted language within the AWEP section that gave priority to projects that aim to decrease water consumption in water short areas like western Kansas. To date, NRCS has yet to implement that priority, but I received reassurances from Chief White that the provision would be implemented properly in the future.

Meeting with Home Builders Association of Greater Kansas City

On Tuesday, I met with members of the Home Builders Association (HBA) of Greater Kansas City. For more than 65 years, the HBA of Greater Kansas City has supported the home building industry to help keep the housing industry strong. The organization is comprised of more than 1,300 member companies and it supports more than 36,000 jobs in the Kansas City metropolitan area. During the meeting, I spoke with the members about my recent request to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi that the expiring First Time Homebuyer Tax Credit be extended and expanded. Unless Congress takes action soon, this valuable credit will expire on November 30th. I also discussed legislation I have sponsored that would extend the \$8,000 credit for two years, expand eligibility to include not just first time buyers but all buyers, and would allow those who purchased homes under the first \$7,500 credit to not have to repay the loan.

Thank you to Phil Perry, Vice President of Governmental Affairs for HBA, for the invitation to speak.

Visiting Community Hospitals to Discuss Health Care

This week, I discussed health care reform legislation during several visits to community hospitals around Kansas. As Chair of the House Rural Health Care Coalition, it is valuable for me to visit hospitals to talk with Kansans about their thoughts on health care reform. The "Big First" alone has 75 hospitals - the most of any congressional district in the country and I have had the privilege of visiting each of these facilities.

St. John's Maude Norton Memorial Hospital: On Monday, I toured St. John's Maude Norton Memorial Hospital in Columbus. In 1999, Maude Norton Memorial Hospital became affiliated with St. John's Regional Medical Center to enhance existing patient care services and strengthen health care accessibility in southeast Kansas. St. John's is a rural health care provider offering 24-hour emergency room care; laboratory services; imaging services; physical therapy; respiratory therapy; and an industrial medicine program. During my visit, I spoke to doctors and staff about the need to implement common-sense ideas to ensure care quality and reduce costs. Thanks to Cynthia Neely, Hospital Administrator, for her hospitality.

Hiawatha Community Hospital: On Friday, I visited Hiawatha Community Hospital, a 25-bed critical access hospital built in 1951 from citizen donations. In 2003, two new operating rooms were added to the hospital's Surgery Center to accommodate the increasing demand for outpatient surgery. The hospital offers a variety of primary and specialty clinics, focusing on outpatient treatment and family practice. During the tour, we discussed how the hospital has implemented an electronic bedside medication administration program to improve patient safety. This system has the ability to monitor drug interactions, even when a pharmacist is off-duty. Also during my visit, I discussed my concerns with the proposed Medicare cuts in current health care legislation before Congress. Cutting reimbursements to Kansas hospitals and other care facilities would mean fewer doctors and nurses and diminished health care access for Kansans. I also visited about changes to our health care system that make sense, such as taking action to expand insurance pools, permitting marketing of insurance across state lines and addressing problems with pre-existing conditions.

I appreciated the opportunity to speak with hospital staff and administrators. Thank you to John Moore, hospital CEO, and to Leslie Bartley for setting up the tour.

Holton Community Hospital: Also on Friday, I traveled to Jackson County and toured Holton Community Hospital, which

is a general hospital and specialty outpatient clinic. During my visit, I discussed the importance of health facilities to Kansas communities, my ideas to lower the cost of health care, and my opposition to the current health care legislation in Congress. I spoke with administrators and staff about the critical need to recruit and retain rural doctors and other health care providers. I also discussed the need to institute a standardized system of electronic records to ensure efficiency in health care and streamline costs. Thank you to Ron Marshall, hospital CEO, for his hospitality.

Speaking with Business Leaders in Kansas

Vinylplex: On Monday, I visited Vinylplex in Pittsburg to learn about this manufacturing company. Vinylplex makes PVC pipes and has the capacity to produce 75 million pounds of pipe each year. Like most businesses in Kansas, Vinylplex is doing its best to cope with the challenges of the recession and keep Kansans employed. I continue to work to expand business opportunities in our state. Thanks to Bill Coleman, President of Vinylplex, for hosting me.

King Louie America: I also visited King Louie America in Baxter Springs on Monday. Formed in 1937, this apparel manufacturer was close to shutting its doors in 2006 but was rescued by Michael Lerner who now owns the company. King Louie America is the leading manufacturer of union made in the USA apparel and provides important jobs to Kansans. Small businesses are the backbone of our economy and companies like King Louie America are vitally important to our communities. Thanks to Michael for his hospitality. Also thanks to Dick McClearen, plant manager.

Wolkar Drug: Also while in Baxter Springs Monday, I visited Wolkar Drug to speak to pharmacist and President of Wolkar Drug Brian Caswell. As co-founder of the Congressional Community Pharmacy Coalition, I understand that pharmacists play a critical role in the health care delivery system. Patients depend on pharmacists for information and counseling to assure that they receive quality products and medical services. I appreciated the opportunity to visit with Brian about health care delivery in southeast Kansas.

Holton Rotary Club Meeting: On Friday, I attended the Rotary Club meeting in Holton to talk with community leaders about the issues that are making an impact in Jackson County. During the meeting, I discussed recent activities happening in Congress including the cap and tax legislation and health care reform legislation. As a fellow Rotarian, I always enjoy meeting with other Rotarians. Thanks to Roger Hower for inviting me to speak.

In the Office

Lynda Hoffman, Steve Dailey and Cindy Circo of Kansas City; Don Curtis and Larry Brennan of Overland Park; and John Patrick and Tom Roberts of Lenexa were in with MO-ARK to discuss pending and proposed flood control projects along the Kansas and Missouri River basins. President Michael Lane and Judith Heasley of Emporia were in with Emporia State University to talk about recent developments at ESU.

Megan Cahalan of Chapman was in with the National Youth Leadership Council to learn about my role as a Member of Congress. Superintendent Ronald Walker, Daphne Maxwell and Bob Henderson of Junction City were in with Geary County Schools USD 475 to discuss education issues related to growth at Fort Riley. Gary and Jean Sellers of Hays were in with Fort Hays State University to talk about the importance of economic education and financial literacy.

Erik Leon of Topeka was in with the National Vaccine Information Center to discuss vaccinations and patient safety. Sherlyn Delany of Overland Park and Rachel O'Brien of Kansas City were in with the Scleroderma Foundation to express their support for Scleroderma research and awareness. Scleroderma is a chronic and disabling connective tissue disorder resulting from an overproduction of collagen. John Currie and Sue Peterson of Manhattan were in with Kansas State University to visit. Chris Gutierrez of Kansas City was in with Kansas City SmartPort, Inc. to discuss his organization's work with the transportation industry.

Leaders from Fort Riley and the Junction City and Manhattan communities were in Washington, D.C., this week in

conjunction with the annual convention of the Association of the United States Army (AUSA). We visited about education, housing, transportation and other needs in the area to improve the quality of life for service members, their families and area residents. Commanding General Vincent Brooks, Lt. Col. Ralph Kauzlarich and Traci Scott were in with Fort Riley. In with the group from Junction City were Mike and Susan Guinn, Terry Heldstab, Mike Rhodes, Jack Taylor, Ben Bennett, Larry Hicks, Denise Ott and Jeffrey Black. In from Manhattan were Lyle Butler, Bob Strawn, Ron Fehr, Loren Pepperd, Bevin Landrum, Dick Wertzberger, Fred Willich and Mike Shilling. John Armbrust of Manhattan was also in with the Governor's Military Council.

Several Kansans visited my Washington, D.C., office to receive a tour of the United States Capitol, including Corey Peterson of Topeka, Gary and Jean Sellers of Bunker Hill and 28 attendees of the Central Prairie Honor Flight program. Also in for a tour from Wichita were Morris, Betty and Sarah Hund; Beverly Sauerwein; and Dennis Kerschen.

Very truly yours,

Jerry